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The purpose of education

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56. The purpose of education

The holy lessons the Vedhas teach

Do fade when master and pupil

Do twist and torture eternal truth

And, seeking riches, distort holy aims.

Embodiments of Love!

When pupils completed mastery, of all branches of knowledge at the *Gurukuls* in ancient India, they were exhorted, on the day they left the sacred precincts of the hermitage, by the loving preceptor who showered blessings on them, to observe certain ideals and adhere to certain practices and attitudes in life. The convocation address, delivered on the occasion of conferring degrees to those who have passed the examinations and who are venturing into the world beyond, is but a poor counterpart of that benediction and that encouraging counsel.

The message communicated then was most elevating and was worthy of practical application in daily life and each axiom was nectarine in content. Every advice was clothed in

inspiration. The tone and tonic effect of the message has become erased in the womb of Time and reduced to a forgotten dream. While the immortal words of the *Siksha Valli* (the section on education) of the *Taithiriya Upanishath* are being repeated for their benefit, the pupils of those days were thrilled and transformed by them. The response of the students of today to the same message will only be a mixture of strangeness and surprise. But that same message can serve as a beacon-light to guide present day students, who are tossed about on endless waves of worry and anxiety caused by in-ordinate desire and vain pursuit of tantalising goals.

The characteristic result of the modern educational process is the bloating of conceit into the size of a pumpkin when only a mustard seed size of learning has been acquired! And, the students aspire for unlimited rewards. As the proverb says, they pay for an onion and demand a melon as extra. The bond between jobs, degrees has to be cut asunder. Education should foster moral and spiritual excellence. Students should cultivate the intelligence needed to cleanse the mind to stand on one's own feet and to tender service to fellowmen. Napoleon used to tell his people: "Be clear. The rest will follow." Minds clear and strong can achieve the hardest tasks with ease.

Share the wealth of knowledge with others

Students in the past practised "simple living and high thinking" but today, they, are engaged in "High living and low thinking". High living urges them to earn and amass money, which is subject to devaluation and diminution. But the wealth of knowledge and character is free of both these. "Fire cannot burn, nor rulers confiscate. Floods cannot dampen, nor thieves decamp with it," as the saying goes. Kith and kin can lay no claim on it. Share this special wealth with others; it does not become less; it grows with each gift. Accumulate wealth and you will be bled dry by sycophants pretending to be friends.

Atheism is growing wildly among students these days. They forget and ignore even elementary human qualities as a result of the cursory and perfunctory study of natural, physical and spiritual sciences. Scientists declare "seeing is believing." But, can the eye be trusted? Can the mind, delight, sorrow, the soul be seen by the eye in order to induce belief? Experience is believing, not

seeing. The milky way, according to scientists, has billions of clusters of stars. How few have seen them! Yet, how many believe in them? Has each person who believes, seen them? So, too, a few have experienced God after arduous processes of denials and assertions and many take their words as genuine and valid truth.

Physical and Spiritual sciences can never clash

The seers of God proclaim what they have visualised, and when people put their faith in it, it is condemned as blind faith as if belief of people in the number of star clusters in the Milky Way as proclaimed by those who have seen them is not blind! Have faith in the Divine and one can experience the Divine. Have faith in oneself and one can have faith in the Divine.

Scientists announce that the Cosmos is' composed of atoms. Spiritual seers announce that God is the minutest of atoms and the vastest among the vast. Sea water yields salt crystals. Similarly, the all-prevading Divinity crystallises as *Avathaars* (incarnations). The crystal is the build-up of many atoms; the *Avathaar* principle is the build up of many divine attributes. The two sciences---physical and spiritual---can never clash; one complements the other, for the sciences related to nature have bounds which they cannot cross. They can study only the created; the Creator is the special field of study for religion. One is a scientist; the other is a saint. The saint probes the root; the scientist peers into the tree above ground.

One cannot succeed in spiritual search unless one has attained a pure, untainted consciousness or *chittha.* This is possible when one becomes aware of one's reality, God. No attempt is made to impart this knowledge to the tender minds of youths. Men are more valuable than all the precious wealth of the world. For, every human body is the temple of God, the Almighty! The individual has to be strengthened and sanctified so that the country or mankind can prosper. Knowledge without action is useless, while action without knowledge is foolishness! Education must be brightened by means of discrimination and spiritualisation. Instead, the educational process fosters merely greed for selfish aggrandizement, without using one's attainments for social service and beneficial sharing.

The duties marked out for the pupils

The touchstone for virtue in a person is his keenness to give up, to sacrifice, to develop detachment. I exhort students on many occasions to associate with good and godly people only so that the precious aspect of divinity in them can manifest. Many of them are humble and subdued and disciplined as long as they are in hostel and college, but once they enter the outer world, they resume the routine and rain themselves. This should not happen. Once Truth is accepted as an article of faith, one should sacrifice one's entire life to its practice. Or else, man degrades himself below the level of birds and beasts.

"Speak the truth. Follow *dharma* (righteousness). Treat thy mother as God. Treat thy father as God. Treat thy teacher as God. Treat thy guest as God." These were the duties marked out for the pupils. The baby is borne and bred by the mother, the child is fostered and fed by the father, the boy is directed and divinised by the guru, and the adult is afforded the chance to serve and sacrifice for the guest. Man is moulded and made to shine and spread light, by these four---mother, father, teacher and guest. Students might fail to revere the guest or adore the teacher as God. But, it will be a great pity if they fall into the sin of dishonouring the father and the mother.

Students! Learn effective means to smother the anxiety, the tears, the cruelties and the lies that afflict the world today. Revive the ancient ideals of learning and of high living in the awareness of divinity. Shine forth in the splendour of eternal truth, in the practice of time tested values and in ways of holy living adjusted to the times. Be ready to renounce that which leads you as precious. Be heroes for adventure. The world needs today youths full of universal love, enthusiasm to serve, and disciplined emotions.

Students must develop extensive interests

When we survey the career of this country we can discover clearly why this great country has come to the present pass. There was no lack of powerful rulers in the past; there was no lack of skilled administration and brave generals. There were many scientists and learned pandits and profound teachers. But, there was one defect which ruined the land, want of unity. There was no spirit of accommodation and social friendship. We may have vast resources but we have some wrong traits which weaken us. We cling to trivialities and mechanical acts and thoughts. We pay no attention to the divine exhortation and instruction that inhalation and exhalation of breath, kills moment by moment, *"Soham" "Soham"* 21,600 times a day! "That is myself" "I am That" "I am God". Teachers have to discharge this responsibility. Since the students are the roots of a prosperous nation, the basis for a strong structure, they have to be moulded into citizens we have to depend upon in the future. Students must develop extensive interests. They must visualise wide horizon.

Be grateful to the Institute that is fostering you. The Sai that is loving you as the mother, protecting you like the father, counselling you as the *guru* and saving you like God should ever be in your memory. Live, wherever your future lay, in accordance to the ideals you have imbibed here. Do not fall into the temptations of imitating wild and vulgar fashions in dress, dimensions and thinking.

The educational institutions must endeavour to produce students with integrity, character and self-confidence. Cultivation of knowledge is secondary. We can assure that colleges of Kamsa or Hiranyakashipu might have produced knowledgeable pupils but would not have produced a Prahlaadha or Krishna! Maintain purity of speech, of sight, of learning and of action. Awarding a university degree on a person of low character and vicious habits can be condemned as sin, for the degree has to be justified to the recipient by his exemplarily noble living.

I am speaking to you in this strain, students, for your own good, for your happiness, for making your lives meaningful, not because I dislike you. Each of you has a living mother though you may not be aware of the depth of that love. Know that Sai Love is the Love of a thousand mothers. Naturally you will find it impossible to gauge the intensity of my Love. And understand this. If you place yourselves outside that Love, you place yourselves outside the love of all mankind. Mine is Love that is pure, free, selfless and unconditional. It is a great good fortune to receive such love.

Do not barter away this priceless human embodiment of the Divine for a handful of trash. Gold can never make a man genuinely human nor can diamonds achieve that goal. It has to be reached through your own sincerity and tireless effort.

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